snippets
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An argument for the trivalent approach to presupposition projection

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According to several theories of presupposition (Heim 1983; Schlenker 2008, 2009, a.o.), presupposition triggers in the scope of universal quantifiers (as in (1)) yield a universal presupposition (cf. (1a)), while in static trivalent approaches (Peters 1979; Beaver and Krahmer 2001; George 2008, 2014; Fox 2008), the presupposition is strictly weaker. In such approaches, (1) presupposes the disjunction of its the truth-conditions and its falsity-conditions, and a universal statement is false as soon as there exists a counterexample satisfying the presuppositional part of the predicate but not its assertive part (cf. (1b)).

(1) Every linguist stopped smoking.
   a. Presupposition under the Universal Projection (UP) view: ‘Every linguist used to smoke’.
   b. Presupposition under the trivalent view: ‘Every linguist used to smoke and stopped, or at least one linguist used to smoke and didn’t stop’.

I claim that the interpretation of the sentence in (2) provides an argument for the trivalent approach.

(2) Every linguist agrees with every other linguist that Uli made major contributions to the field.

First, note that \( x \text{ agrees with } y \text{ that } p \) presupposes that \( y \) believes \( p \) (Lahiri 2002). I assume the following LF for (2) (\( p \) abbreviates the that-clause):

(3) \([\text{Every linguist}][\lambda x[\text{every linguist diff from } x]][\lambda y[\text{x agrees with } y \text{ that } p]]\)

On the UP view, (2) is predicted to presuppose (4a), which reduces to (4b) (assuming there exist several linguists):

(4) a. For every linguist \( l \) and every linguist \( l' \) distinct from \( l \), \( l' \) believes \( p \).
   b. Every linguist believes \( p \).

Since (2) also asserts that every linguist believes \( p \), (2) is predicted to assert what it presupposes. It should thus pattern with (5), which asserts what it presupposes and is perceived to be tautological (technically, it is Strawson-tautological, being Strawson-entailed by the tautology – cf. von Fintel 1999):

(5) Mary is her sister’s sister.
(2), however, is not perceived as tautological.

As a reviewer notes, the meaning of *agree with* might be more complex. For instance, the sentences in (6) suggest that Mary was aware of Paul’s opinion and discussed it with him before agreement was/wasn’t reached. This inference, however, behaves like a presupposition, being preserved, e.g., under negation. Even if we assume a stronger presupposition for *agree with* to take this into account, the assertive content would still be redundant.

(6) Mary agreed/didn’t agree with Paul that Jane should be invited.

The trivalent view fares better. On this view, (2) is true if every linguist believes $p$, and false if there exists a pair of linguists $(l, l')$ that falsifies the universal claim that for every linguist $l$ and every linguist $l'$ distinct from $l$, $l$ agrees with $l'$ that $p$. That is, it is false if there is a pair of linguists $(l, l')$ such that $l'$ believes $p$ and $l$ doesn’t. The predicted presupposition – the disjunction of the truth and falsity conditions – is as in (7a), which reduces to (7b) (assuming there exists at least one linguist):

(7) a. Every linguist believes $p$, or there is a linguist who believes $p$ and another linguist who does not.  
b. There is a linguist who believes $p$.

This seems better. The presupposition no longer entails the assertion. Furthermore, the predicted presupposition seems plausible. In (8), for instance, an existential inference seems warranted.

(8) Does every linguist agree with every other linguist that Uli made major contributions to the field?

References


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